

Simulation in Program Assessment: A Pilot in the School of Social Work

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School of Social Work

Background

- BU SSW mission to develop dynamic and diverse social work practitioners, leaders, and scholars.
- MSW practitioners address complex and interconnected social problems such as poverty, inequality, addiction, homelessness and trauma.
- Over 740 students enrolled each year, onsite and online programs, with required field practicum of at least 1,000 hours.

Council on Social Work Education Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS)

Learning Competencies 2015

1. Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior
2. Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice
3. Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice
4. Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice
5. Engage in Policy Practice
- 6. Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities**
- 7. Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities**
8. Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities
9. Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Council on Social Work Education EPAS Learning Competencies 2015

Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

- apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients and constituencies; and
- use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies.

Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

- collect and organize data, and apply critical thinking to interpret information from clients and constituencies;
- develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives based on the critical assessment of strengths, needs, and challenges within clients and constituencies;
- select appropriate intervention strategies based on the assessment, research knowledge, and values and preferences of clients and constituencies; and
- critically choose and implement interventions to achieve practice goals and enhance capacities of clients and constituencies.

Council on Social Work Education EPAS Learning Competencies 2015

- CSWE emphasizes a holistic approach to competency-based assessment, “the demonstration of competence informed by knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that include the social worker’s critical thinking, affective reactions and exercise of judgement in regard to unique practice situations (CSWE, 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), p. 6).”
- This multi-dimensional approach to assessment lends itself to performance or observation of practice, rather than a test, exam or even a reflective paper.
- Two measures of each competency required; field education evaluation provides one measure.

BU Provost Learning Assessment 2017 Mini Grant

- Purpose: to pilot the use of simulations as a method of program assessment for the Master of Social Work program
- Background: commonly used in other professional programs, simulations are relatively new in social work education and provide opportunity for an observable, holistic and multi-dimensional assessment of student competence

Background

- Pilot based on the work of Bogo, Rawlings, Katz and Logie (2014) and others who have demonstrated the value of this method in social work education.
- This method has shown to have a high degree of validity and reliability and will therefore be beneficial in program assessment (Bogo, Rawlings, Katz and Logie, 2014).
- At the Fall 2016 CSWE annual conference, there was much interest in uses of simulation to teach and more accurately and objectively assess student and program performance.

Project Plan

- Simulations conducted at the end of a foundation year students' program plan, where they have completed or nearly completed the following coursework:
 - CP 759 **Intro to Clinical Social work Practice**
 - CP 770 **Clinical Practice with Individuals**
 - CP 771 **Clinical Practice with Groups**
 - CP 772 **Clinical Practice with Families**
 - MP 759 **Communities and Organizations: Analysis and Intervention**
 - HB 720 **Human Behavior in the Social Environment**
 - WP 700 **Social Welfare Policy I**
 - SR 743 **Research I.**
- These foundation courses are intended to provide clinical and macro students with sufficient knowledge, skills, judgment and self-regulation to demonstrate competence in the learning outcomes.

Project Plan

- With faculty input, two case scenarios were developed that seek to imitate “real life” clinical and macro social work practice.
- A rating tool and a self-reflection tool would be developed with input from faculty to measure the competencies in a holistic, multi-dimensional manner.
- Raters would be experienced professional clinical and macro social workers recruited from SSW’s alumni and instructional network to observe the student in the simulation, complete a formal rating tool and provide feedback to the student.
- Paid actors (students from CFA) would be engaged to act as the client in the scenario. Actors would be trained to “portray the full spectrum of characteristics of an assigned client role in a realistic and consistent manner that is reproducible from encounter to encounter (Bogo, Rawlings, Katz and Logie, 2014).”

Project Plan

- Twenty (20) simulations to be conducted, 15 with students majoring in clinical social work practice and 5 with students majoring in macro practice.
- Each simulation to be 30 minutes, followed by a 15 minute de-brief session where students reflect on their performance and are provided with feedback from the rater and the actor.
- Students to be recruited from all three of SSW's program sites: Charles River Campus, Off-Campus and Online Programs.
- Simulations to be held during the late Spring semester.

Project Plan

- Results of the rating tools would be analyzed and used in program assessment, providing SSW with information on the demonstrated behavior of first year students.
- Utilization of information: e.g., if students do not adequately demonstrate active listening or ask about the client's goal, the curriculum may need to be adjusted to teach those skills differently.
- After the simulations are completed, the project team would convene to review implementation and learnings and share with faculty and the Dean.
- Plan to expand simulation to larger sample of students and develop for advanced year students.

Summary of Work: Fall 2017

- Literature review to assess current practices, success and challenges among graduate schools of social work nationally.
 - Bogo, Rawlings, Katz and Logie, *Using Simulations in Assessment and Teaching*
- Developed clinical and macro conceptual maps to link competencies to practice behaviors to simulation case scenarios
- Developed draft simulation scenarios: one each for clinical and macro social work settings
- Held meetings with Clinical and Macro Faculty to share information about pilot project and request feedback on specific practice behaviors to be assessed and scenario language and context
- After drafting scenarios and maps, conducted follow-up with Department Chairs and Faculty to solicit feedback and input
- Clarification from CSWE about need for 100% assessment for all measures – project on hold

Conceptual Map Example: Clinical

Conceptual Map of Competencies and Practice Behaviors to be Assessed with Clinical Case Scenario			
Competency and Practice Behavior	Indicator for Rating	Specific Client Domains	Possible Clinical Case: Simone
Engagement			
Uses empathy, reflection and other interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies	Demonstrates empathy and sensitivity; helps the client express strengths, needs and feelings through appropriate verbal feedback and nonverbal expressions	Emotional distress	Coping with sexuality
Engages diversity and self as learner	Explores socio-political cultural cues and context for understanding; able to elicit and affirm multiple identities, issues of oppression and intersectionalities	Age	18; senior in high school
		Culture, race and ethnicity	Jamaican-American, Black in dominant White and Eurocentric culture
		Class	Not stated
		Ability	Not indicated
		Citizenship status	Citizen, 1st generation immigrant
		Gender	Female; disconnection with peer heteronormative gender norms
		Sexual orientation	Difficulty accepting same-sex attraction in context of homophobia
		Religion/spiritual practices	Involved in church and cause of concern because of views on homosexuality

Conceptual Map Example: Macro

Conceptual Map of Competencies and Practice Behaviors to be Assessed with Macro Case Scenario			
Competency and Practice Behavior	Indicator for Rating	Specific Constituent Domains	Macro Case: YouthBeat Partnership
Engagement			
Uses empathy, reflection and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse constituents	Demonstrates empathy and sensitivity; helps the constituent express strengths and needs through appropriate verbal feedback and nonverbal expressions	Community/organizational inequity	High suicide rate among LGBTQ youth of color; culturally incompetent practice at youth serving organization
Engages diversity and self as learner	Explores socio-political and cultural cues and context for understanding; able to elicit and affirm multiple identities, issues of oppression and intersectionalities within systemic context	Age	Youth, ages 15- 19
		Culture, race ethnicity	Caribbean-African
		Class	Low income
		Ability	Not stated
		Citizenship status	Not stated; possibly undocumented
		Gender	M, F and Trans
		Sexual orientation	LGBTQ and heteronormative
		Religion/spiritual practices	Not stated

Case Scenario – Clinical Example

Instructions to Students

- You are working as a social worker at a youth mental health agency. Youths are referred to you by families and schools and can also be self-referred. Your role is to meet with youths to assess for any psychosocial needs, to develop a plan for meeting those needs, to provide counseling, and to connect youths to resources to meet those needs. On average the youth social worker can conduct a first interview and then meet with the youth for up to 12 visits, to complete an assessment, provide counseling, and facilitate the referrals.
- In this vignette, you are meeting for the first time with an 18-year-old woman who self-referred. Her grades have been dropping, and she has been experiencing anxiety and high levels of stress. Your referral form indicates that she attends high school and is in grade 12.
- You will be meeting with Simone for the initial 20 minute visit to assess what her needs are and to develop some initial goals.

Case Scenario – Macro Example

Instructions to Students

- You are working as a macro social worker at CDC Inc., a community development organization in a mid-sized city that works with local residents to promote affordable housing (including a land trust, homebuyer program, mortgage relief program, tenant education and advocacy) and community safety. The organization has strong roots in the neighborhood and a resident-led board; it is well-respected “traditional” human service organization.
- The neighborhood is comprised of predominantly low income, people of color (primarily of Caribbean-African descent), who have historically been left out of decision making in the city. You are the full time coordinator of the youth program, where about 15 young people, ages 15 – 19, work as peer leaders to conduct community education campaigns around topics of interest to them. You also lead the highly successful summer jobs program that reaches 45 youth.
- In this vignette, you are meeting for the first time with Delia, the coordinator of another youth program, called YouthBeat. You have heard of YouthBeat, but do not know much about them; they do not have a website and you are not sure where they are located. Delia called and requested a meeting with you to discuss possible areas for collaboration on a new program to provide outreach and support services to youth of color around LGBTQ issues in order to address the high suicide rate among this population. CDC, Inc. has not done much around LGBTQ issues, so you welcome the possible collaboration opportunity

Project Paused – Jan. 2018

- Next steps were to develop simulation protocol, hire actors/clients, recruit students, observers, etc.
- BUT new accreditor requirements to assess 100% of students raised feasibility issues (BUSSW current 700+ students).
- Discussed with accreditor, appealed this rule, to no avail.
- Discussed with department chairs and considered continuing pilot regardless, but need for “two measures” required us to re-focus efforts on other assessment procedures.
- Documented learnings and saved for future use.

Learnings

- Development of indicators takes significant time and multiple perspectives to hone in on “good enough” language.
- Faculty need reminders and prompts to assist them in working through the process of developing indicators and scenarios.
- Some faculty highly enthusiastic about process; disappointed about need to terminate.
- Labor intensive process to hone and focus to achieve depth.
- Accreditation requirements impact preferred assessment activities.

Next Steps

- Simulations on hold, for now.
- Continued discussion about the behaviors demonstrated for competencies 6-9 found to be very helpful.
- Possibility to continue work might be doctoral student independent study.
- EPAS will be reviewed again in 2021 by accrediting body, we will provide input to the revision process to advocate for sampling in assessment.
- Selected second assessment measure: course embedded assignments.

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS?

Thank you!